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Nuclear Issues

1. Pakistan Nuclear Safety

Pakistan's Nuclear Regulatory Authority has reportedly instituted a nuclear disaster management mechanism for nuclear power plants.

2. India Nuclear Safety

Citing safety concerns, India's Atomic Energy Regulatory Board ordered the shut down of one of the two plants at the Rajasthan Atomic Power Station.

3. Related News and Analysis

Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesman Aziz Ahmed has reiterated that his country will not "roll back its nuclear programme under any pressure." Farah Zahra's essay in the daily Dawn, Pakistan, underlines the need for bilateral measures to reduce the risk of nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

Afghanistan

1. Current Situation

US confirmed warplanes bombed the positions of warlords opposed to Afghanistan's interim government. Fighting between rival ethnic factions in the interim government has also been reported in Northern Afghanistan. According to Leslie Oqvist, the UN regional coordinator in southern Afghanistan, US warplanes may have caused greater civilian deaths than previously reported.

According to reports published by Al Ahram (Egypt) and the Far Eastern Economic Review, last week's murder of Abdul Rehman, civil aviation and tourism minister in Afghanistan's interim administration, presents a serious challenge to the stability of Afghanistan's interim government. The daily News, Pakistan, reported an increase in the flow of narcotics from Afghanistan into Pakistan.

2. Reconstruction

The daily Frontier Post, Pakistan, reported that the campaign by UN agencies to get Afghan girls to school has made "very slow" progress. A report by Murray Hiebert of the Far Eastern Economic Review notes that the Afghan government needs more help from the international community.

3. Humanitarian Crisis

The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) reported that nearly 20,000 Afghan refugees have gathered at the southern Pakistani border post of Chaman. Afghanistan's new Ministry of Health and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has launched a campaign to provide measles vaccine to about 120,000 children living in Badakhshan Province in northeastern Afghanistan. According to the World Health Organization 25 children have died in a suspected influenza outbreak in the province.

4. General Assessments

In his essay for Himal magazine, reporter Rahimullah Yusufzai writes about the failure of Western journalists "to critically probe either US military policy or the complexities of the Taliban legacy in Afghanistan."

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. News

India's Defense Minister George Fernandes ruled out a pullback of troops from the India-Pakistan borders until Islamabad has "fulfilled" the conditions spelt out by New Delhi. Pakistan has rejected an Indian request to share information from Sheikh Omar, a prime suspect arrested in connection with the kidnapping and murder of US reporter Daniel Pearl.

The Indian Air Force conducted a new round of exercises that is likely to be followed by fresh Army maneuvers. Pakistani and Indian troops reportedly exchanged weapons fire along the Jammu and Kashmir border. Sixteen Pakistani soldiers were reported killed in landmine blasts.

2. Analysis

In an essay for the daily Hindu, India, K.K.Katyaly examines the conditions that can lead to troop pull back from Indo-Pakistan border. Indian Journalist Kuldip Nayyar's article argues that Pakistan has not significantly changed its old positions towards India. Using interviews with key players, A.G. Noorani takes a close look at the Lahore summit of February 1999 between India and Pakistan.

Pakistan

1. Pakistan: Domestic Situation

Pakistani police reportedly found four rockets planted on a wooden frame with timing devices and aimed at Karachi airport. Government authorities in Islamabad demolished 12 "unauthorized mosques" in the city.

In an essay for the Indian Express, Husain Haqqani critically examines President Musharraf's decision to continue as the president of the country even after the elections scheduled for October 2002. Masooda Bano's essay in the daily News, Pakistan urges the government to make education, control of population growth and environmental degradation its key priorities.

2. U.S. - Pakistan Relations

Pakistani journalist M.B.Naqvi wrote a two part overview of Pakistan-US relations to argue that the Pakistani government has no reason to be "gung ho about becoming new allies of the US."

India

1. India: Domestic Situation

Hindu nationalist Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is believed to be ready to start the construction of a Ram mandir at Ayodhya on March 15. VHP has also warned of a "Hindu backlash" against those opposed to the construction of a Ram temple and demanded that the government return the land acquired by the Center in Ayodhya to the Ram Janambhoomi Trust. In his essay for the daily Hindu, India, Harish Khare's urges Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee "to demonstrate the same kind of courage the Pakistani President has shown in standing up to medieval voices and individuals." Ayodhya is the site of the sixteenth century Babri mosque that was destroyed by Hindu militants in December 1992. Militant Hindu parties have since been trying to construct a Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Exit polls have predicted a hung verdict in Uttar Pradesh (UP) with the Samajwadi Party emerging as the largest group.

In an article for the Indian Express, A.M. Vohra, a retired lieutenant general, who was also vice-chief of the Indian army, argues for restructuring of the Indian military.

2. U.S.-India Relations

According to official indications, India could acquire up to 150 to 200 radars from the US as the two countries move towards developing broader military ties.

Kashmir

1. News and Analysis

Indian and Pakistani newspapers reported continuing political unrest and violence in Jammu and Kashmir.

The daily Indian Express published an interview with Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, a member of a parallel election commission formed by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference to monitor the forthcoming Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir. Yasin Malik, the head of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) has stated that if the Indian government "does not provide a space (for dialogue), then violence will automatically take place." During his visit to China, President George W Bush said that his administration is "working hard" to resolve the Kashmir issue.

Regional News

1. Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are reportedly close to

signing a Norwegian facilitated Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Meanwhile, the first major incident following the declaration of cessation of hostilities by the Government and the LTTE was reported when an unidentified flotilla of boats tried to evade the Navy. Jehan Perera's comments in Himal Magazine points out factors that can derail the peace process. An editorial in the daily Indian Express argues that India should not get involved in the negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE.

2. Nepal

Nepali Maoist insurgents killed over a hundred security personnel while security forces killed 49 insurgents. Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, was shut down as the result of a nation-wide strike called by Maoists to protest the declaration of national emergency. Meanwhile, the Nepali Parliament voted to extend the state of emergency for another three months. Over 2500 people have been killed in the six year old communist insurgency. Suman Pradhan's essay in Asia Times examines the current situation in the country.

3. Philippines

Three American soldiers were killed and four were missing after a US Army helicopter involved in anti-terrorism exercises in the Philippines crashed into the sea.

4. Bangladesh

Talbibul Islam's report in Asia Times examines Bangladesh's current economic condition.

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